DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 721 EA 025 740

TITLE	Textbooks: What's at Stake?
INSTITUTION	National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, Madison, WI.
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	18p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Focus in Change; n6 Spr 1992
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Multicultural Textbooks; Textbook Bias; *Textbook Content; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Preparation; *Textbooks; *Textbook Selection

ABSTRACT

Textbooks have an enormous influence on the curriculum of schools across the nation. Many issues are taken into consideration when selecting textbooks. Textbooks that present students with a multicultural curriculum are often at the center of debate among school administrators. This journal presents a series of articles based on interviews with experts. After an introduction, the first article is "Whose Knowledge Do We Teach?" (Anne Turnbough Lockwood). In it Michael W. Apple, the distinguished scholar of textbooks, describes the typical adoption practices in adoption states and explains how those states' processes influence not only the selection practices in other states, but the content of textbooks as well. Apple asks whose knowledge should be taught and calls for fundamental systemic change before textbooks will improve. He also unravels the complicated politics that often exist within adoption states and explains how they affect the content of textbooks, pointing out that the least satisfied educational consumer will probably be the educator in an innercity who is working with a multicultural population. The second article, "The DeFacto Curriculum" (Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood) discusses P. Kenneth Komoski, the Executive Director and founder of the Educational Products Information Exchange Institute, who believes that the key to improving textbooks can be found in taking action to improve their instructional effectiveness--a point that he argues is seldom considered by publishers. The third article, "Political Debates, Classroom Realities" (Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood), discusses Jules Levine, a principal from New York City's Seward Park High School, who explains the realities of textbook selection in a nonadoption state and describes how those practices affect the strongly multicultural and bilingual population of his school. The issue concludes with, "Commentary" (Richard A. Rossmiller). (KDP)

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SPRING 1992 NO.6

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SPRING 1992 NO.6

Textbooks: What's at Stake?

A recent article in *Education Week* noted that the Texas Board of Education voted to approve new U.S. history textbooks — with the proviso that over 3,700 errors in the books be corrected by their publishers and a hefty fine be paid (Jan.22,1992,p.5).

Two hundred and thirty factual errors were identified by longtime conservative textbook critics Mel and Norma Gabler, and further scrutiny by publishers and the state education department turned up many more.

Among the mistakes were incorrect dates and a description of Sputnik as "the first successful intercontinental ballistic missile."

In this issue of FOCUS IN CHANGE, we turn to a discussion of textbooks and the power they — and their producers — hold over curriculum and instruction in the United States. Dramatic stories such as the incident in Texas highlight the true price of such costly mistakes, the cost in learning that would be paid by students.

What do educational reformers consider when they contemplate textbooks and their role in American classrooms? Special interest groups argue that the needs of their constituencies must be met, but do not necessarily agree on the means. Advocates of a return to the Western tradition of a humanities-based curriculum adamantly argue for mastery of prescribed content that will ensure "cultural literacy." Bitter debate rages between those advocates of a curriculum based on the Western tradition and others who insist on an "Afrocentric" or a "multicultural" curriculum. There is additional heated argument between educators and policymakers over the merits of an Afrocentric versus a multicultural curriculum.

This splintering of focus has resulted in textbooks that "mention" much but contain little substantive, in-depth discussion of content. In short, textbook critics agree that textbooks try to be all things to all people — and end up not pleasing anybody very much.

But how well do they succeed in engaging the learner? Considering how heavily teachers rely upon texts in the classroom, do students find them interesting? Challenging? Boring? How instructionally effective are texts in use in the classroom? How bound are teachers to texts? How free are school staff to introduce other material into their classrooms?

In this issue, we discuss those and other questions. First, Michael W. Apple, the distinguished scholar of textbooks, tells us what typical adoption processes are like in adoption states and how those processes influence not only the selection practices in other states, but the content of textbooks as well.

Apple, who is the John Bascom Professor in the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, asks whose knowledge should be taught — and calls for fundamental systemic change before textbooks will improve.

He also unravels the complicated politics of adoption states and explains how they affect the content of textbooks, pointing out that the least satisfied educational consumer will probably be the educator in an inner city who is working with a multicultural population.

We also hear selected comments from P. Kenneth Komoski, the Executive Director and founder of the Educational Products Information Exchange Institute, who believes that the key to improving textbooks can be found in taking action to improve their instructional effectiveness — a point that he argues is seldom considered by publishers.

Komoski insists that there is a driving need for well-organized information from a source other than the vendor. He maintains that information needs to be easily accessible and useful for educators' decision-making under time constraints. He makes a strong case for better integration of instructional resources at the school site. Finally, he suggests that the developers of texts work interactively with students throughout the development process to steer texts in a direction that will be more responsive to the targeted group of learners that the book is trying to reach.

Finally, we talk to a principal from New York City's Seward Park High School. Jules Levine, a veteran educator, tells us the realities of textbook selection in a non-adoption state and describes how those practices affect the strongly multicultural and bilingual population of his school, a sizable percentage of whom are immigrants and must learn English. In the face of inadequate or non-existent materials, Levine relates how members of Seward Park's staff have rallied to produce their own texts for Chinese and Spanish-speaking youngsters.

In addition, we provide a selected bibliography of readings on this complicated and interesting topic. ■

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"People have a sense that the textbook is an insurance policy, and they want to be sure their kids have that insurance."

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WHOSE KNOWLEDGE DO WE TEACH?

BY [redacted] LOCKWOOD

Michael W. Apple is the John Bascom Professor in the Departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A former elementary and secondary school teacher and past president of a teachers' union, he has written extensively on reforming the curriculum. Among his many books are Teachers and Texts *and* The Politics of the Textbook.

"WE do have a national curriculum," Apple begins emphatically, "but it's not determined by a democratically-elected body and it's not determined by a central ministry of education. The curriculum is determined by the textbooks, and the textbooks — by and large — look the same all over the United States."

What do textbooks look like nationwide? Apple replies, "There's a standard rule in elementary and secondary school curriculum and in texts. Don't drop anything — only add. As a result, we have longer and more expensive texts. There is no doubt that there is a movement to incorporate more and more information. Because of that, there is more fragmentation." He adds, "It's important that we understand why that's the case."

Becoming A Textbook

Market conditions dictate how textbooks are written, marketed, and selected, Apple says. "Whether we like it or not, textbooks have to be peddled on a market. They're not just textbooks, they're books. That means they're commodities and, just like peanut butter and toothpaste, they exist in a very competitive market."

A competitive market dulls the possibility that otherwise well-intentioned publishers will take chances on content or risk politically sensitive material. "Risks will be taken infrequently," Apple notes, "and particular kinds of strategies will be used to guarantee that publishers will make money."

He adds, "I'm not saying textbook publishers are venal; they're not simply trying to make a buck. They're also trying to do decent things for kids, but in order to do decent things for kids, they've got to make money."

States that are "adoption states" strongly influence the publishing industry as well as the resulting quality and content of textbooks. Apple describes the geographical cluster of adoption states. "There are 22 states that have state adoption policies, twenty or so of whom are in the South. If we were to draw a line from California around the Sunbelt across to Maryland, you'd find that the bulk of the states have adoption policies."

The Process of Textbook Adoption in Adoption States

Apple explains that the typical adoption process, which varies to some degree between states, usually begins when a Governor or Department of Public Instruction appoints a committee for the sole purpose of determining which textbooks should be used statewide. The committee frequently has a political composition determined by groups that committee members represent, such as teachers, unions, business people, parents, and politically active citizens.

"The committee's task is to determine which books are good and which books are bad," Apple explains. "In some states, such as Texas, the rule used to be that there had to be a minimum of two textbooks in each subject area and a maximum of five that would be approved for state adoption. These numbers change over time."

Three states exert the most power in terms of the share of the market that they control — Texas, California, and Florida. Apple points to California and Texas in particular, "where between 20% to 30% of the textbooks used throughout the United States are purchased."

Such buying power translates into "musts" for publishers. "In order for a textbook publisher to make a profit, it must get its book approved in Texas," Apple says. "Similar things occur in California. If a book is accepted on these state lists, it makes the difference between a profitable text and a text that is a disaster.

"That means that the texts in use in New York, Idaho, Wisconsin, and other non-adoption states are really determined by what will sell in the Southern tier of states in the Sunbelt, not by what principals or teachers really think is essential."

How do adoption states influence non-adoption states to such an extent? Apple replies in economic terms. "It is simply too expensive to have a different textbook for Wisconsin than Texas, so publishers will only publish large quantities of those texts that can be used in state adoption states. The adoption states really determine what is sold and what is marketed."

He swiftly draws an analogy. "If I'm a marketer of peanut butter and I know the people in Wisconsin like peanut butter without sugar, but people in California, Texas, and Florida like peanut butter with sugar, it would probably be too expensive for me to operate a plant that turns out two different kinds of peanut butter. So the people in Wisconsin learn to have sugar in their peanut butter."

Apple is quick to clarify that textbooks will reflect the educational reforms, debates, and struggles that

occur in the predominantly Southern and Sunbelt adoption states. He says, "Publishers care much less about what goes on in non-adoption states because the major profit will occur in the other states that buy statewide."

The Politics of Adoption States

ARE the politics of adoption states more conservative in a way that slants textbook content in a conservative direction? Apple replies, "States are very contradictory. California is an interesting example. It has one of the largest populations of neoconservative-conservative movements. It is, after all, the state that brought us Reagan, and the state is still strikingly conservative. Yet it also has the highest proportion of people who were born outside the United States and an educational system that is very politicized over minority students' rights, languages and cultures. Therefore, textbooks accepted in California are going to be compromises.

"Most Southern states tend to be more conservative ideologically, more conservative about the way they deal with teachers. They tend to be more controlling. Partly that reflects a history of mistrust of teachers in the South that goes back for a hundred years or more. So their emphasis is placed on teacher-proofing texts, on making them specifically related to state tests because these are the states that often have more testing and reductive accountability schemes."

Apple continues, "When you combine fact-based texts and tests with fairly conservative ideologies and conservative ways of thinking about teaching — such as, kids need to be controlled more, don't let them bring other material into the classroom, we just want the stuff from the textbook — that leads one to expect that nationally textbooks will be pretty conservative. That's more frequently the case than a number of teachers, administrators and policymakers would like.

"On the other hand, because California is such a mixed state ideologically and so politicized over content, in order for textbook manufacturers and publishers to get materials accepted there, they've got to treat the issue of Hispanic, Asian, and African-American history seriously."

But in order to accommodate differing ideologies, publishers compromise and try not to offend anybody. "Because of that, a lot of material is watered down. Publishers can say, 'Well, of course we have twenty pages on slavery.' But most groups of color will look at the material and say, 'It doesn't go far enough.' Or conservative groups will say, 'Well, you've given up the vision of the Western tradition that we think is essential.'

"THE result is that many textbooks are not liked by anybody — including the students — which calls forth a different kind of response from publishers, namely, 'We've got to stop dumbing down the texts. We've got to make them more interesting. We've got to have more pictures which will turn on more kids, especially kids who learn visually.'

"This leads to textbooks being fundamentally contradictory, largely conservative — although less so than a lot of critics would like to admit — but still captured by Western visions, by center-right kinds of beliefs."

He notes dryly, "I think William Bennett would like them a little more, for instance, than someone who is an inner-city African-American activist."

The Impact of Homogenized Textbooks

Some populations will be more affected than others by the resulting homogenized texts that predominantly reflect Western traditions and conservative educational reforms. "There are almost no publishers left who market specifically Afrocentric books," Apple states. "There are no large publishers that publish textbooks for inner-city schools that are specifically involved in the cultures and histories of African, Asian, or Hispanic kids. Those publishers died, because often they were kept alive by large foundations. They're not around anymore because large foundations don't have the kind of money to keep them alive.

"Even if you wanted other texts that highlighted an Afrocentric curriculum — whether we agree with that approach or not — they wouldn't be available because it's too expensive to publish these kinds of materials. This means that principals and teachers in inner-city schools actually have almost no choice about the kind of materials they use. They have to build their texts by themselves. This can be very difficult for those people who want a very different set of texts, or a very different set of materials to use with kids."

Intensification — Less Time, More to Do

Apple cites the fundamental structure of schools as the critical lever that will effect change, pointing to increased emphasis on coverage as an impediment to reform. "Teachers literally have no time even to breathe," he says emphatically. "And it's just as bad for administrators, so as we add more onto teachers, we are adding double onto administrators and actually giving them less resources to deal with. The first thing we have to do is act creatively on what we might call the economy of time in schools.

"There are many instances of administrators and teachers working with parents and local community people to find the best standardized textbooks. The problem is that the work of administrators and teachers

has become what I call 'intensified' — that is, there is more to do and much less time to do it. Because of that, the time that it takes to find the much better books is not there. School staff must rely on which publisher makes the most interesting presentation. And, again, publishers hire very talented sales people who go out and do road shows.

"Obviously, like any commercial concern, they try to put their best foot forward. So while teachers, administrators, and others are spending a lot of time trying to find better materials, that time is at a premium.

"In addition, what I call 'intensification' refers to not only adding many more subjects in our schools, but spending more time on them. Every time there is a social problem we blame the schools, so we add more on for kids to know. And even with the Coalition for Essential Schools arguing that we must reduce the material and do it well, the movement is exactly the opposite in the United States.

"It makes no difference if we upgrade teacher skills so that they can sort through good and bad material unless they have the time to put that into practice."

He adds passionately, "Any school system that requires teachers and administrators to be martyrs to find the time to *do* all this good stuff can't be very good. Right now, because of the economic pressures on schools and the intense criticism of schools, teachers and administrators don't even have the time to think about whether they should have more staff development or not. When we have sufficient resources and time, then we can think about whether we need more staff development."

How might teachers become better able to work with the existing textbooks that do not adequately meet the needs of their students? In his response, Apple accentuates the positive. "There are good teachers working creatively with texts. It is vitally important that administrators encourage teachers to teach other teachers about what they are doing.

"We really do need more visitation days," he continues. "We need teachers who watch other teachers who are using texts in creative ways. Having someone tell you what to do is not as effective as actually going into a school, watching a teacher take a textbook that has been mandated and work with it to involve secondary and supplementary materials in a way that does everything we would want — the kids are deeply involved, there is serious and substantive work going on in the school, the work is politically rich and interesting, the kids are learning to criticize and also to accept at the same time. That has to be seen in action, and I think a lot of school districts are doing that."

The Need for Systemic Change

IN order for school staff to clear the necessary time to devote to trying new ways of working with texts and observing other teachers, there is a need for systemic change. "We ought to think about textbooks as the tip of an iceberg," Apple says. "Here are the

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problems with texts, but texts are only there because of the way schools are organized, because we have a lack of time for teachers to find other material, because there's not a lot of alternative material being produced anymore, and because we have a system where everything is highly centralized and highly bureaucratized. In order to alter texts, we have to think ecologically. How does this text fit into administrative regimens, lack of resources, lack of time?

"AT the same time if we can examine those places where texts are decentered, where there are interesting uses of them, we can discover what's being done by creative teachers and administrators who are willing to take some risks and who are doing some remarkable things."

Whose Knowledge Should We Teach?

One reason texts grip curriculum and instruction so powerfully is that people fear change and want their children to be taught the material that they learned in school or that is part of their own culture. Apple expands on this concept. "In a time when cultural authority is falling apart in many people's minds, we have come to realize this issue: Is this knowledge you've been teaching my kids really true? Is it my knowledge?

"Rather than focusing on that question and having serious widespread national and public debate about it, we try to answer it by adding a few more pages into the textbook. While I do not think a textbook-based curriculum is necessarily wise, I want textbooks to improve, because it would be romantic to think that they are going to go away. They are the curriculum in American public schools — whether we like it or not — but focusing on the textbook opens a door we're not totally willing to go through.

"It opens the door to the most important question we can ask about our schools: Whose knowledge should we teach? But we seem to be very frightened about walking through that door. We're unwilling as a nation to argue that out because it's politically very threatening to everybody. Answering that question will require that we face ourselves and ask: Who benefits from schools? If you're poor, you don't do as well, and if you're African-American or of color, you don't do as well. Partly, it's because the texts are alienating.

"If we faced this issue, we would have to confront the structural limits of what is possible in our schools, and that is very threatening to many people."

> *Focusing on the textbook opens a door we're not totally willing to go through.*

Potential for Change

Given constraints of resources, a text-driven curriculum, and a need for systemic change, is there any possibility textbooks will improve? Apple's answer is considered. "There are real gains being made," he replies, "but at the same time there are losses. People have realized that we have to change the texts because texts are the curriculum. That's a major gain, because textbooks were ignored for many decades. So for the first time, we have people actually thinking about and acting on the force that determines the curriculum. That's a progressive step.

"On the other hand, the organizing framework for how we're transforming texts is largely conservative."

Why is a conservative framework the dominant frame of reference for textbook reform? Apple replies in economic and political terms.

"We have a crisis in the economy of the United States and people are scared for their kids," he explains. "People want stability in schools, in their homes, in their jobs — paid and unpaid. People are feeling that their lives are under threat and one thing they should focus on are the institutions closest to them. It's hard to see the economy in general, but you can see your job, your marriage, your family, and the school your kids attend. And one thing you want is for your kids to have a future that is no lower than yours. You want your kids to do better.

"You want textbooks that teach the kinds of things that will help in jobs and that will guarantee that your kids do well on tests, because you know that if they don't have that, their future isn't going to be as good as yours, no matter how bad yours is. People have a sense that the textbook is an insurance policy, and they want to be sure their kids have that insurance.

"Even if you believe that you want your kid to be politically critical, you still want to make certain that he or she gets what is going to be on the test. Therefore, you want to focus on the textbook, which contains the stuff that is going to be the curriculum."

A Clever Coalition

Apple points to political factions nationally that separate people even further. "There are fundamentalist groups who are concerned that their lives are under threat, for whom schools become aspects of sin. I happen to disagree with that position, but one understands their vision that one's whole life should be centered around what is most important. I don't agree with what's most

important to them, and I don't like their wish to impose it on me and other people, but I do respect their vision. They will struggle with the nature of the text, in particular, because they think texts are teaching sinful things.

"There is also a group of neo-conservatives who believe that what has made this country great is the Western tradition. They believe we have to return to a romanticized past where all the kids sat with their hands folded above the desk and learned the great ideals of the Western tradition.

"That," Apple exclaims, "is a totally romantic vision! School was never like that! But their vision is that society will splinter unless we have that.

"Then, in dominance, we have the most powerful group, which we might call economic modernizers, the people who say, 'We're losing a race with Germany and Japan. We've got to tighten up this ship and we've got to have teachers more tightly controlled. We've got to have work skills and discipline because we're losing economically. These are the people who have the money to provide reports on educational reform — although there are centrist and liberal reports as well. But by and large, the most famous documents are center-right or totally rightist reports.

"What we have is a very creative and very clever coalition that has been built with the central idea that we want to make schools and textbooks more geared to the economy, more geared to efficient and accountable results and, at the same time, have some stuff in there from people of color, about unions, about women, and so on."

The Democratic Process as Change Agent

Involving more people in the process of changing textbooks as well as the textbook selection itself is the only way that ultimately will effect needed change, Apple maintains. One example is utilizing students to help evaluate instructional materials.

"In some schools in Wisconsin, teachers give kids two or three sets of textbooks and ask them, 'Here's some material that we're thinking about using next year. As a student, what do you think of it? Is it boring? Is it interesting?'

"I think that's a very good idea. It doesn't go as far as I would like, but the attempt is to involve more people."

He emphasizes, "Clearly the best thing that principals and other administrators can do is involve more people in the selection of textbooks."

But involving more people in textbook selection has its own set of pitfalls, about which he is candid.

"There *are* dangers," he stresses. "One-third of the school districts in Wisconsin, for example, had some sort of censorship controversy last year. Nevertheless, conservative parents and fundamentalist parents are doing things that, in some ways, I find very positive. They are saying, 'I want to be deeply involved in decisions about my kids' education.' That should be applauded.

He continues, "Any time a parent says, 'I want to know more and want to be involved, that's democracy.' Unfortunately, there is a degree of certainty that goes with this that says, '*We* know the truth.' Once you open the doors to having more people involved in evaluating textbooks, including kids, or in trying to think through what the curriculum should be, you get much more political controversy. Because of the controversy, there is actually more bureaucracy because more steps need to be added for people to go through for their appeals.

Apple acknowledges that expense as also an important factor. "Involving more people is more costly. But I don't know of any better solution than to open the process up, make it public, involve teachers and kids as much as possible, and justify one's decisions publicly on educational grounds.

"Otherwise we get alienated kids, even angrier parents who feel that curriculum is not something that they're interested in, and teachers that feel it's being imposed on them as well, which is a recipe for disaster."

Reasons for Hope

Apple says he remains optimistic, however, that textbooks can improve. "We have to be realistic," he concedes. "These are tough times. They're going to get worse, I think, in terms of financial resources for teachers and administrators. But a good reason why we should be at least somewhat optimistic is the change that has already occurred.

"When I looked at textbooks from 1890 to 1920 in the United States, they were often utterly racist. They were so poorly designed that you wonder how anybody could put them in the classroom with a child. They treated teachers as if they were totally stupid. It's hard to find those kinds of texts anymore.

"That means that somehow — through really hard work — teachers, administrators, community members, and kids said 'No.' I don't think the conditions were any worse then economically than they are now. So while a lot of people might feel very pessimistic about what's happening now, this is where history becomes very useful.

"We can look back and say, 'Why, it was really bad!' And, while it's still very difficult, major gains have been made in some areas. In other areas, they haven't been made as much and they are too conservative. They are still not totally honest about the histories and cultures of people who have been less dominant in the United States. But there have been gains. It's very, very important that we remember that we built these things, that nobody else did. That means we can rebuild them." ■

THE DE FACTO CURRICULUM

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

P. Kenneth Komoski is Executive Director of the Educational Products Information Exchange Institute, which he founded in 1967. A former professor and high school teacher, Komoski has served on several blue-ribbon panels related to educational technology, has been consultant to UNESCO's Secretariat for Educational Technology, and has been a PBS producer and host for the monthly series, Educational Computing. *In this article, he argues that all instructional resources in a school need to be much more tightly integrated.*

P. Kenneth Komoski's voice is so engaging and pleasant that it belies the vigor of his statements about textbooks and how they should change. He stresses the publishing industry's failure to address the issue of instructional effectiveness, which he believes to be one of the most critical issues related to any consideration of texts.

If publishing companies are in the business of producing instructional materials, why don't they carefully consider how effective those materials actually are in the classroom? Komoski's reply is blunt.

"They don't have to. There's no profit," he answers. "If you are in the textbook business, you have been working in a company that has been in publishing a long time. Your annual data — until very, very recently — show that you are going to sell more next year than you did last year, just because of demographics."

A growing student population has helped publishers focus on profit rather than instructional effectiveness, Komoski claims.

"We've had a constantly increasing student population for most of the 150 years the textbook industry has existed. If you were a publisher, you could make the same thing in the same way, because you knew there was an expanding market.

"The major emphasis in the industry has always been on marketing, on getting sales representatives out in the field, on making it easy for the gatekeeper to justify a sale.

"Historically, the textbook selection process has been given very short shrift by schools. Given the fact that textbooks are used 80% of the time, the kind of time that is necessary hasn't been put into adopting material in most schools and in most states."

Instead, people responsible for textbook adoption have taken the word of the publisher at face value, bolstered by any additional data they display, such as correlations between the book and a district's curriculum. However, as Komoski points out, publishers can hardly be considered unbiased providers of information.

Unbiased Information

Given such a negative picture, what new considerations would improve both adoption processes and the quality of textbooks?

"The thing that needs to happen to improve the whole process is information," Komoski responds,

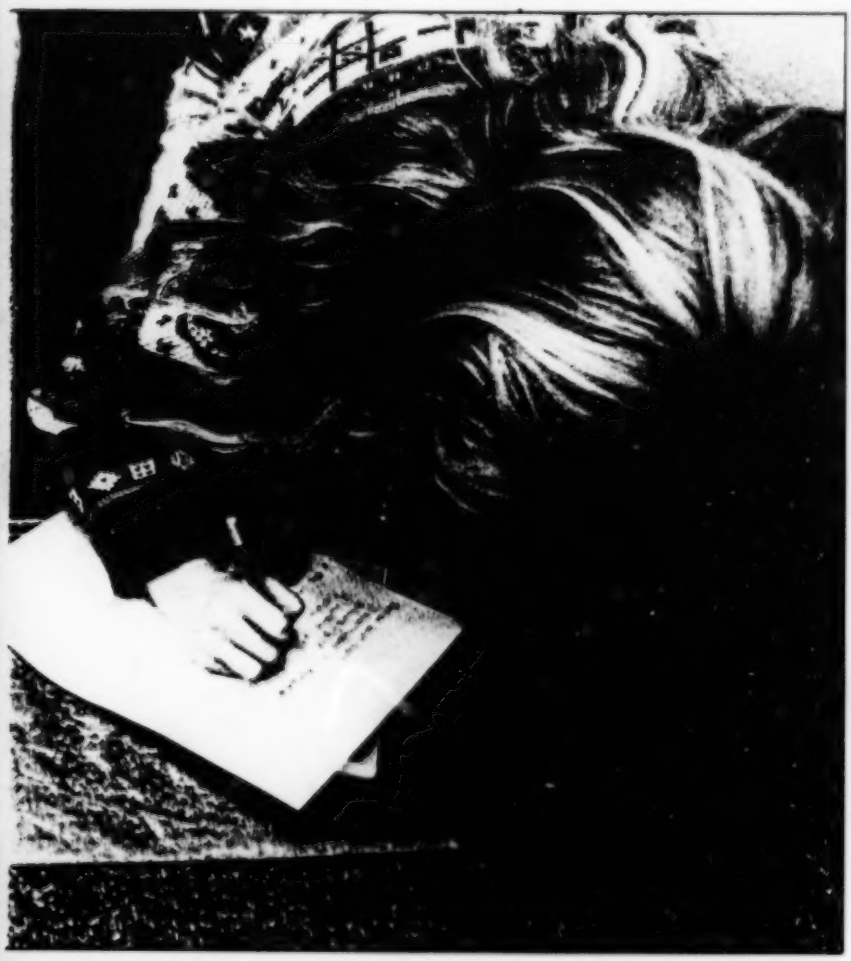
"information that doesn't come through the vendor as the major supplier of that information for decision-making."

As an example, he targets the rationale underpinning his company, Educational Products Information Exchange Institute. "When I started this organization 25 years ago, we did market research which showed that 90% — and in some cases 100% — of the information used to make a decision was the information supplied by vendors.

"The other part of our research showed that we found very little discrimination being used by decision-makers."

But information alone is not enough, Komoski cautions, cognizant of time demands on busy school administrators and staff. "What's needed is information that's very well-organized so that it can be used for decision-making within the limited time that people have to make the decision."

He claims that limited time is a major barrier to informed decisions. "In general, in the average school district, staff don't have the time to really know their options, to gather information that's objective about those options, and to weigh the information. What's needed is a very good, available, accessible flow of information."



However, making unbiased information available is not a panacea for textbook reform, he notes.

"Schools notoriously will not pay for information. We've never been able to aggregate the kind of resources that we need to supply information on products across the board. But in the last few years, we have been able to provide the only information out there that helps schools evaluate integrated learning systems."

Integrated learning systems are comprehensive packages of computer-based instruction that include hardware, courseware, and an instructional management system.

Why will schools pay for independent information about integrated learning systems and not about textbooks? Again, Komoski's reply is couched in economic terms.

"Because schools are spending $100,000, $200,000 or $1,200,000 on these systems," he responds. "They're willing to pay for information about the system. It's not that they don't spend that kind of money on textbooks, but textbooks have been around forever. Textbooks are part of the woodwork!

"Integrated learning systems are perceived as being different, so if I'm going to spend $100,000 on one, I have to show that I've got information."

Monies spent on integrated learning systems are much more visible and are pulled from one budget line as opposed to several, Komoski explains. "In most cases, when a major purchase on an electronic system is made, it's a capital expenditure. It's a morass to try to really analyze what schools spend. Computers are a little empire; video is another little empire. Textbooks are an empire, and there's all the supplementary materials that schools buy in addition to textbooks. That goes under a different budget, under what is called consumables."

A Cost-Effective Investment

Focusing on instructional effectiveness of instructional materials would be the most

cost-effective investment a district could make, Komoski argues.

"If you could get people to zero in on the issue of the instructional effectiveness of instructional resources, they would get more for their money than by attending to anything else in the entire spectrum of an educational system. If the instructional quality improved by 25%, we would really be getting an incredible amount for our money. As it is, we don't get our money's worth, except in terms of the production. Textbooks are a good buy in terms of the quality of the production, but in terms of the quality of the instruction, they're a joke."

How would he evaluate textbooks to discern their instructional effectiveness? "I don't want to evaluate them," Komoski responds tartly. "I just want them to do a better job, and we know what they need to do to accomplish that.

"First, publishers need to develop the book so that it really responds to the school's curriculum, so that there is sufficient material in depth and in scope to address that curriculum so that it can really be taught and learned. As it is, the books have such broad coverage."

In developing the book, he claims, the developer doesn't ascertain that a particular lesson or chapter will communicate to the targeted audience of students.

"After all, an instructional resource is an attempt to communicate with learners," Komoski insists. "If you are going to communicate with someone, you need to know whether you are getting through. In general, there is no procedure that provides feedback from an appropriate group of learners to the people who are writing the book to let them know whether they are communicating to these learners. That needs to be done."

Some general principles of instructional research and design are helpful as well, he adds, such as the importance of providing feedback to learners. "It's easier to provide feedback with an interactive medium such as computers or interactive video. But there are things that could be done within textbooks, such as making them more interrogative throughout rather than throwing a bunch of questions at the end of the chapter."

End-of-the-chapter questions aren't generally considered the most empirical method of assessing how much the student is learning, Komoski remarks, and adds, "Often they are not really relevant to the major concepts that are being developed in that part of the book. They are frequently questions to which it's easy to find the answer."

Good writing would also considerably improve textbooks, Komoski states, "good writing that engages one, that asks a lot of implicit questions and some explicit ones. For instance, how do you suppose the blood really proceeds through your body?" He laughs. "Rather than stating, 'Now we are going to discuss the circulatory system.'"

He continues, "Good writing just improves the instructional effectiveness of the material, and publishers don't invest in good writers."

But given the success of books that have broad coverage of content area and aim not to offend anyone, would good writing survive a state adoption process? "I think so," Komoski replies. "If texts were written in a very interesting fashion, I think the people who sit and read them at the adoption would say, 'This one is interesting.'"

Komoski looks back to some pioneering legislation he pushed through the California legislature, legislation that was signed into law by Reagan in 1974 while he was Governor of the state. He worked on the legislation with Bill Ryan, later the Congressman from California who was killed at Jonestown.

"Bill Ryan was an ex-schoolteacher," Komoski explains. "Together we wrote a bill that the State Department never applied. It was called the Learner Verification and Revision Legislation, wherein producers had to show that they had in fact verified that their material had been tried with learners and that they had been advised on the basis of their trial with learners."

This type of legislation is sorely needed, he believes, and would push publishers toward a more constant consideration of the students for whom the books are written.

Komoski believes that improving textbooks could be almost as simple as soliciting reactions from students who are representative of youth the publisher is trying to reach and then attending to their responses. "There's no need for a rigorous measure," he notes.

He gives an example from an instructional design course he used to teach at Teachers College-Columbia University. "I would ask, in which class would you do a better job — a class where you teach on television and can't see the students, or a class where you are present in the room and able to see their faces? Obviously you're going to be a better teacher in the second way.

"Similarly, if you're developing instructional material, have finished writing a chapter, and immediately had some kids read it and you talked to them about what they read, don't you think you would write a better chapter? It's common sense."

Schools could improve student learning simply by better integrating their instructional resources, Komoski believes. "In most schools today the textbook has essentially become the de facto curriculum. That means there is an implicit buyuig into the idea that the textbook really will do the job. Our research shows it simply can't because it's trying to be all things to all people."

For instance, "The average math test has about 220 to 250 lessons in it. There are 180 days in my contract as a teacher. Unless I'm using that

book surgically and identifying what I'm supposed to be teaching out of those 250 lessons, I can't teach the whole book. I only have 180 days.

"If I really think about what I have to communicate to these kids — what they have to master — some of it is very tough and some of it is easy. Out of the things that are tough from a problem-solving standpoint, how many lessons in the book address this? Often, it's one lesson. In a standard math text, that's two pages.

"Unless I integrate other materials, unless I recognize that only 40 to 60 percent of the book is relevant to my curriculum, and I ascertain that I can teach that 60 percent of the book in 120 days, then what am I going to do with the rest of the days?

"What I'm going to do is teach in-depth those things that can't be taught in the two pages that the book allows. That means I've got to integrate other kinds of activities, some of which I'll make up. But there isn't an integrated conceptualization or plan that tells me how to use five or six resources.

"What often happens is that the teacher believes that because the book was adopted, it must be the curriculum. She teaches Chapter One and then she teaches Chapter Two. The next year she realizes she couldn't cover the whole thing, so she starts using the book a little more selectively."

He summarizes, "The teacher needs information that is well-articulated in relation to the curriculum."

Not only does the teacher need that information, s/he needs it the first day of class, Komoski says, so that s/he can envision the year's instruction.

How can such integration of instructional resources be achieved? Komoski responds, "There are two parts to improving the instructional quality of materials. There are the things the producers can do and there are things the users can do.

"Kids are supposed to learn something. The way they learn in the system we have is through engaging with instructional resources."

But instructional resources are dominated by textbooks, whose pace and superficial 'mentioning' of topics contribute to teachers' press to 'cover' material.

Komoski points to research he and his colleagues conducted in the 1970s, in which they found that a staggering 98 percent of curriculum content was found in the textbooks teachers used with students. Only two percent of curricular content consisted of materials introduced independently by the teacher. These statistics confirm a text-driven, text-based curriculum.

Frequently, Komoski explains, instructional resources fail to engage the learner. "The learner may already know a good deal of what's in them, or the texts don't communicate to the learner in a way that makes it possible for that learner to understand what is there or want to learn because they're written in such an uninteresting way."

He elaborates upon the concept of being engaged with the materials. "We fail to realize that we have an energy system in a school that is defined by the energy of the kid — who is the ultimate evaluator of all this stuff.

"The kid either opens the receptors and gets engaged or keeps them closed. If the material doesn't turn the kid on, it can look awfully good from the standpoint of an evaluator's criteria, but for that kid or that part of the population, it's not what's needed."

The Future of Instructional Resources: Any Hope?

Komoski is eager to discuss the future and the potential to change instructional resources, including textbooks. "What's the future?" he asks rhetorically. "Is there any hope?

"There is to a degree, in the sense that the textbook industry has been imploding for twenty years. Fewer companies are making more materials. Publishing is not the great business it used to be."

He continues reflectively, "The textbook industry may die of its own lead weight — gradually or rapidly — depending on what else has been going on. As fewer and fewer textbook companies have been present in the marketplace, there have been more and more electronic educational companies present. On our database, we now have information on educational software from over 1,000 companies."

Komoski admits that many of these educational software companies are very small, some only consisting of two people. The reasons are economic: low overhead because there is no need for inventory, a warehouse in which to store inventory, or a staff to fill orders.

He explains, "You and I could go into business tomorrow. All we would need is a computer.

"The medium lends itself to being shaped by learner feedback. It's interactive. We could, in fact, aggregate the data on the kids' responses and improve the communication with these kids if we wanted to do that. Our research indicates that few software companies do that."

Komoski predicts that customized textbooks will emerge within this decade. "A school will be able to say, 'Here is our curriculum. I want every lesson you send me to address this curriculum.'

"One could say, 'I want seven lessons on problem solving, and I want seven lessons on this other unit over here. This kind of targeted, integrated set of resources could enhance enormously the quality of instruction in classrooms."

This vision of instructional resources is technologically possible today, Komoski says. "It's simply a question of getting the system to accept it." ■

POLITICAL DEBATES, CLASSROOM REALITIES

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

ONE criticism leveled at textbooks is that they are homogenized, bland, safe — with an emphasis on coverage rather than substantive discussion of a topic. In this article, a New York City principal of a neighborhood high school discusses how existing textbooks fail to meet the needs of his bilingual, multicultural student population — and the creative efforts of part of the school's staff to amend that situation.

Jules Levine, principal of Seward Park High School in New York City, speaks authoritatively, yet thoughtfully about how state textbook selection practices affect his school's population and needs.

Seward Park, a neighborhood high school located on the lower East Side of Manhattan, has a strongly multicultural population of approximately 3,000 students with a demographic breakdown of approximately 40% Asian, 45% Hispanic, and 15% African-American. Levine explains, "A majority of the youngsters — about 80% — come from homes where either one of the Chinese dialects or Spanish is the home language."

He highlights the population's language diversity. "Two generations ago, Italian would have been the home language. This has always been a school for immigrants and first-generation kids."

Located on the lower East Side of Manhattan — not far from the Statue of Liberty — the school's population is economically depressed and highly transient.

The Constraints of Textbook Selection

Can existing textbooks adequately serve the needs of Seward Park's population? In his answer, Levine first relates the adoption practices to which Seward Park must adhere.

"New York State pays for the textbooks used in New York City through what is called the New York State Textbook Loan Law. The state provides school districts with $25 for every pupil on register each year. The vast majority of textbooks are purchased through these funds.

"Seventy-five percent of the funds are provided in the Spring term and the remaining 25% are provided in the Fall term. If we would have 3,000 kids on register as of October 31 when the state makes the allocation, the following April we would receive a total package of $75,000, or 3,000 times $25. The state also provides us with a very, very voluminous list of approved texts. Only those texts may be purchased."

Although New York State provides a list of approved texts, it is not an adoption state. Levine clarifies this point. "If I want to buy a social studies text or a math text, I cannot buy it unless it's in the booklet that the state provides for this purpose. If we can't find a text that's suitable, then we can make a request downtown in Brooklyn, which would then be approved by the State Education Department. We would ask to purchase a book that is off list, and if we can really show that there are no books on list that would meet the educational purpose, then we could buy the text."

Levine acknowledges, "It is a rather cumbersome and laborious process."

Textbooks on the approved list in New York State are traditional texts, by and large, that have been in the mainstream for some time. "They are basically books that are produced by textbook publishers to meet the political requirements. Namely, they want to be able to make a sale.

"Because of that, they tend to provide texts that are in the middle of the road, that are going to be acceptable to the State Education Department and the public interest groups that are able to influence the State Education Department. In New York State, you will get traditional textbooks that are not going to be radical and that are not going to be very, very conservative."

Financial constraints pose problems as well. "When you have 3,000 kids, $25 per kid in terms of expenditures for texts each year does not go very far. For instance, if you look at a science, math, social studies or literature book, you're going to find that the $25 will probably cover one book for that kid.

"Because the student has six or seven classes, we're going to work from our inventory and use a very limited amount of the money to purchase new materials. We're going to be able to replace some books and maintain inventory."

He concedes, "It's not a perfect system, but the hope is that the faculty and department heads are aware of new texts that come onto the market. They are close to the vendors, and the vendors are aware of our needs and interests." However, Levine is aware of the political realities that govern both textbook adoption and development.

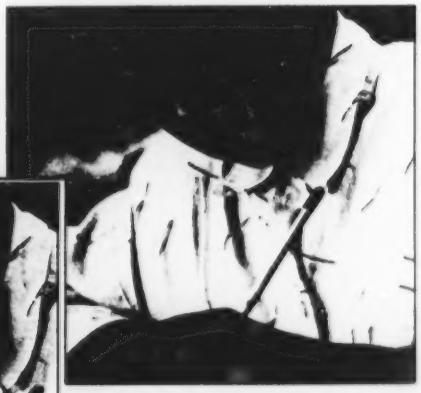
"Because the state approves the texts and because of the mass marketing principles that publishers use, textbooks are going to be safe, not very venturesome," he explains.

Political Debates, Classroom Realities

One current area of debate that has an impact on textbook selection — a debate that is heightened in New York City — is the controversy surrounding a move toward an Afrocentric versus a multicultural curriculum. This debate is directly relevant to Seward Park's multicultural population.

Levine describes his dilemma as an

There has to be a greater understanding of how kids learn and what is meaningful to them.



administrator. "In New York City, we have a large number of teachers who went to college in the 1960s and 1970s. They are more left of center than right of center politically, and tend to look at the '60s as a golden age. They would like very, very much to reinterpret the texts within their political ideologies.

"One has to be very concerned about academic freedom as opposed to allowing propaganda and particular political ideologies to permeate a teacher's work in the classroom," he reflects.

"But texts are very inadequate. The corrective measures — as well-intentioned as some of them may be — are really not well thought out. They tend to create tremendous problems. When attempting to provide a multicultural curriculum, there is often a tendency to go far overboard. In effect, you are teaching what you want in terms of working and playing well with others, not developing the social sense of history, political science, or economics that is really meaningful. This is a problem we are currently trying to deal with."

Personalizing the Learning Experience

How should textbooks and instructional materials change to be more effective with a student population such as Seward Park's?

Levine's response is thoughtful. "I don't know if I have an ideal vision. I do believe we have to be able to personalize the learning experience for kids. We have to learn more about the ways kids learn, so that we become more student-centered as opposed to curriculum-centered."

He hastens to add, "I don't mean you forget the curriculum. What I'm saying is that there has to be a greater understanding of how kids learn and what is meaningful to them.

"That is something we do very little in the United States in the mainstream. Special education," he emphasizes, "is working much better on these areas than general eduation. We ought to have individual educational plans and we have to look at the way kids learn. We need to deal with dysfunctional problems by being able to diagnose them far earlier than we currently are doing."

What will it take to achieve that vision? Levine points to systemic change, or "a reorganization. I'm a practical administrator, but I also have my own views. In my own district they are talking about doing away with the traditional 38-minute periods, eight classes a day, and having an eight-day cycle so that we can have 50 to 60 minute periods to deal with seminars and individual research. We could deal with other kinds of remediation that involve peer work, collaborative learning, cooperative learning.

"These things are not readily enhanced by most of the traditional textbooks although there have been improvements and changes in the last five to ten years. Still, I don't see them really meeting the needs of many students."

The Needs of Immigrant or Bilingual Students

Especially the needs of bilingual or immigrant students? "It becomes a circus," Levine responds. "Obviously, if a youngster's native language is Chinese, you are not going to find many texts produced in the United States, because the market is not here.

"Although the Asian population has been increasing, the number is not significant enough to make most American firms produce texts. There are some texts that we used in the past, but if they are produced outside of the United States — in Taiwan and Hong Kong, for instance — these nations did not adhere to the international copyright laws. Therefore, they were not included in New York State's list of approved texts.

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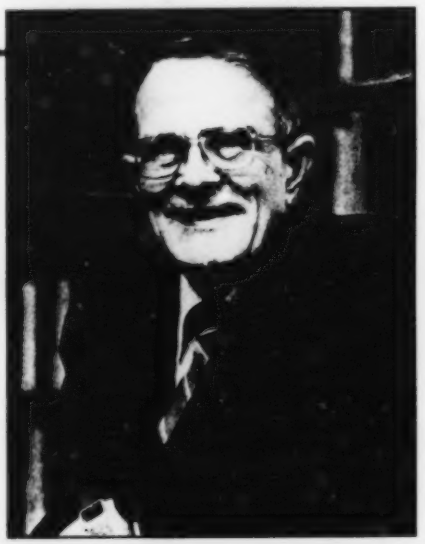
COMMENTARY

RICHARD A. ROSSMILLER



Reading the copy for this issue of FOCUS IN CHANGE brought to mind an experience I had several years ago while giving a lecture at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. I had been invited to meet with a class of Brazilian graduate students to discuss the organization and operation of American schools. I noted their looks of amazement and incredulity when I said we do not have a national system of education in the United States; we have a system in which each state is responsible for education within its boundaries. These Brazilian students, who were accustomed to a highly centralized system of education, questioned how we could operate such a "crazy arrangement," in which it appeared there was no central authority deciding what should be taught. My reply was that there were at least two important unifying forces in American education — textbook publishers and national organizations of professional educators.

Michael Apple's comments highlight the important role textbook publishers play in American education. Although we do not have a national system of education, we do have a group that, by default, provides a national curriculum — the textbook publishers! If they are to survive in business, they must at least break even and if they are to prosper, they must make a profit. To make a profit, a textbook publisher must "crack" at least one (and preferably all) of the big textbook adoption states: California, Texas and Florida. The economics of the textbook industry make it almost inevitable that the textbooks which pass muster in these states will become the textooks used in the rest of the country, thus establishing a national curriculum.

Does this de facto national curriculum pose a problem? Indeed it does! In order to survive the scrutiny of the textbook selection committees, (typically comprised of individuals who are appointed, not elected, and thus not accountable to the public) textbook writers "mention" a lot of subjects, rarely treat any of them in depth, avoid controversy at all costs, and consequently fail to engage the attention of most students or challenge them to think seriously about contemporary issues. Textbook writers seem to say less and less about more and more and if the present trend continues, eventually the textbooks used in our schools will say everything about nothing!

Apple also points out that the time that teachers and administrators devote to selecting from among the available textbooks must be stolen from other pressing responsibilities, and Komoski emphasizes that, as a consequence, most of the information on which textbook selection is based is provided by the publishers themselves. Despite the fact that the length of the replacement cycle insures that the textbook chosen will shape the curriculum in that subject matter area for five to seven years or more, and that textbook purchases represent by far the largest expenditure on instructional material for most schools, relatively little time or money is invested in objective analysis of the books available. If textbooks do indeed drive the curriculum, and there is ample evidence that they do, it is unlikely that any educational reform effort can improve the qualify of American education unless the quality of textbooks and other instructional materials improves. How can we hold high expectations for students and expect them to master the knowledge and skills they need to be successful adults if the basic instructional materials we give them are superficial and bland and fail to engage them in critical thought and reasoning?

Given the diversity of the students who attend American schools it is probably naive to expect any single textbook to serve all students adequately. The problems staff at Seward Park High School experienced in trying to find instructional materials adequate to meet the needs of all their students are not unique; similar problems could be recounted in many American high schools.

Talk of reform and restructuring of our educational system is rampant these days but too much of the discussion fails to recognize the lack of depth and quality in the instructional material we provide for students. ■

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"This has been a problem in the twelve years that I have been here. In many instances, the books we want to use are printed in the Far East and are not acceptable because the publishers don't agree to the copyright convention. A second problem is that the market is so small that the cost to the vendor to be listed, to have the book reviewed by New York State officials and put on the approved list is expensive and time-consuming. The publisher often doesn't want to or can't do it.

"We have a very, very difficult task in finding appropriate texts." He enlarges, "It is so difficult that two things happen. First, we constantly get involved and it takes years to finally purchase a book. We wound up working in-house over the past 25 or 30 years producing our own texts in these languages in science, in math, and in social studies. Our texts are companion works to the written English texts that the kids have.

"So we have homework assignments and translation of texts and teaching materials produced by our Chinese bilingual program and now by our Spanish bilingual program as study guides and aids for the youngsters and for the teachers, so that they can more adequately develop the curriculum.

"Secondly, we have worked with New York State which has established a Chinese and Asian bilingual technical assistance center in New York City. One of the branches of that center is located in our high school. This center assists with the preparation of materials, texts, and other things that will help the high schools deal with the Chinese and Asian population."

Although similarities exist with New York City's Hispanic population, Levine notes that it is much easier to obtain textbooks because the Spanish-speaking population is much larger than the Asian population. "There are bilingual programs in many parts of the country so it is a little easier to get texts in Spanish than in Chinese."

How does the process of generating foreign language texts evolve? "Our teachers have worked with their colleagues over a period of time. We've gotten monies from Washington, such as bilingual grants. Over a period of years, we have had teachers work together, sometimes with outside collaboration, and then we wind up printing the texts with a local vendor and providing the students with the materials when they are enrolled in these courses."

Levine shrugs aside any praise. "It's the only thing you can do. Our former English department chair's memoir describes how the faculty started this work in the 1950s in terms of English as a second language. We have expanded it in the '60s, '70s, and '80s into all the disciplines, because at any one time we have around 40% of our students in our bilingual program.

"Every student who comes into our school has to graduate and be able to function in English. Students must pass statewide competency tests. Therefore, we probably have one of the largest ESL programs in the United States. I have 22 ESL teachers.

"In every youngster's first two years they have three periods a day of English and in the remaining two or more years, they generally have two periods a day of English. But in addition to that, the staff provides them with mathematics, social studies, science, and even business ed in their native language."

How possible is it that textbooks will change to become more effective and useful with multicultural and bilingual populations? Levine phrases his answer carefully.

"The analogy I would use is the President's trip to Japan," he responds. "Is it possible for the three automobile manufacturers to become more competitive? It's possible, but not probable. That's the sad part." ■

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FOCUS IN CHANGE is published quarterly during the academic year (September, December, March, and May) for Members of the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development. For membership information, please write or call the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1025 W. Johnson Street, Suite 685, Madison, WI 53706. Telephone: (608) 263-4730.

Photocopies of FOCUS IN CHANGE are available in packets of 25 ($15 per packet), for Members' use in conducting workshops, conferences and meetings. Please contact NCESRD for ordering information.

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Design: PETER MANESIS

Typography: RICHARD BROWN

IMDC Graphics Bureau, School of Education, University of Wisconsin

Photography: GREG ANDERSON

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